

Third Sunday of Easter

Fishing

May 05, 2019

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Today's gospel presents us with one of the first images of the church. The Church is like a fisherman's net cast out on a vast sea teeming with life. Its apostles cast their nets by preaching the Word in the hope of drawing in as many as possible. Understood in this light, our Gospel story offers a few interesting details.

First, John relates that the apostles had been fishing by themselves all night yet had caught nothing. It is only as morning dawns and Christ himself appears on the shore to instruct them where to cast their net that the disciples are successful. It is not by relying on their own knowledge and talents, but by relying on Christ and by listen to his voice sounding over the waters that the disciples will succeed in making a catch..

A second important detail concerns the haul of fish itself. It is surreal, beyond all expectations, filling the nets to the breaking point, too heavy for the apostles to even haul aboard. They rather have to drag the net ashore alongside their boat. John even tells us how many fish were caught--153. Now that is a rather random number. But nothing is random in scripture. So why 153? Many ideas have been suggested. The one I like best is that it's the number of known species of fish listed by Aristotle. 153 fish means every species of fish. The church then is here called to draw within itself the entire human race in all its diversity. It is to be truly a catholic church—a church of the whole, with room for all, Jew and Greek, man and woman, slave and free, and in modern America today, we might add, black and white, migrant and native, gay and straight. No one is to be barred entry.

Another detail concerns how the story ends. As the disciples work to bring in their great haul, Jesus starts a fire and prepares breakfast for the weary disciples who had been out on the lake working through the night. In Jesus we are called to our truest selves, not only in our work but also in our rest. Indeed we are called not only to proclaim his word but to rest in his presence, to take sustenance from his spirit.

And then we have the interchange between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asks Peter whether he loves him three times. Peter becomes exasperated by the third time, but it mirrors his having denied Jesus three times the night Jesus was arrested. Its not Jesus who needs to hear Peter's repeated profession of love, its Peter himself. Jesus responds to each profession by calling upon Peter to tend his lambs, to tend his sheep, and finally to feed them. A passing of the shepherd's staff you might say, from the Good Shepherd to a new shepherd. Peter's own most recent successor, Pope Francis in one of his first homilies said, "Shepherds should smell like their sheep." He thinks that to renew itself the church needs to step outside the sanctuary and go out into the world, among all classes of humanity in all its diverse shapes and forms.. To renew itself the church must cast a wide net across a world teeming with life that can be as turbulent as any sea. And so Mass ends by our being sent off, in fact the word Mass comes from the priest's last words—*ita missa est*, Go you are sent forth.

Finally, there is the breakfast barbeque—another early Christian symbol, a symbol of our own common meal in the Eucharist, where we too take our nourishment from Christ, present in our midst in our gathering together into one body, and in our sharing together

of the bread and the wine. After mass, you are all invited to a parish barbeque, so to speak. Not of bread and wine, but of tamales and margaritas. Eat your fill, but respect those margaritas. A little can go further than you might expect.